# VIDEO CONFERENCING GUIDE



## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH VIDEO CONFERENCING

iEARN projects, housed in the Collaboration Centre, mainly use **asynchronous** connections through engaging in dialogue in the discussion forums and media sharing. Many iEARN educators use **synchronous** connections, like video conferencing, to enhance their global collaborative projects. This guide is designed for global educators who want to involve their students in using video conferencing technology in classroom settings.

**Asynchronous vs Synchronous:** Asynchronous connections (i.e. discussion forums) happen at different times. Students and teachers do not need to be online at the same time. Synchronous connections (ie. video conferences) happen in real time. Students and teachers need to be online at the same time to connect synchronously.

## THE BENEFITS OF VIDEO CONFERENCING

- Provides real time communication
- Allows us to engage in communication that promotes strengthening global relationships
- Builds excitement and motivation among students
- Low cost and easy to arrange (compared to in-person exchange)

> " Videoconferencing makes learning REAL. The students share their stories and their thoughts and, by default, both students are learners and both are teachers. This is one of the most empowering experiences of my career."
>
> Laura Sabatino | Science Teacher | Winchester, VA

## The "Getting to Know You" Conference

Teachers should get to know one another through video conferences before engaging their students in conferences. And before involving students in the sharing of academic content, allow them an "ice-breaker" video conference session. Some ideas for initial conferences include the following:

1. Students introduce themselves by telling their "name story." What is their name? Who named them? Why was this name chosen? What does their name mean? Do they like their name? Do they have a nick- name?
2. Each student introduces himself and shares one thing he likes about his city/town/country and school.
3. Before the scheduled conference, students write "getting to know you" questions that are open ended on small pieces of paper and put them in a jar. (Example: "Tell me about your family", not "How many are in your family?") Teacher A pulls question out of jar and students from Teacher B's class who want to share answer to that question, do so. After all are finished, Teacher B pulls a question for Teacher A's students to answer. Rotate turns until ALL student have shared at least one response.
4. Students sing their school, patriotic, or popular song for each other!
5. Allow the students to suggest first conference ideas.

# TYPES OF VIDEO CONFERENCING

## The Collaboration Conference

Most iEARN projects are designed to give students collaborative experience in a workplace setting using 21st Century Skills. While the type of collaboration depends on the project, here are some ideas for these sessions:

1. In a discussion conference, students are given questions or topics ahead of time and jot down ideas they want to share with each other. Students use the raise hand feature or the whiteboard to share responses to each question.

2. Schedule a guest speaker on a topic related to the project. Students can submit a google form so that speaker may prepare responses to questions they have ahead of time and take turns asking their questions during the conference. Allow for impromptu questions that may arise as well.

3. Students meet with their global peers to make plans and divide tasks for a technology product (movie, PowerPoint, digital portfolio).

4. After teachers give students directions in the main conference room, students are divided into breakout rooms to complete a task in small groups. Teachers visit and observe what's happening in those rooms.

## The Final Project and Exhibition Conference

iEARN encourages exhibitions of student work, an important final component of project based learning. If you have partnered with a teacher or group of teachers on a project, one exhibition idea iEARN recommends is scheduling a conference to celebrate the students' successful completion of project and to provide an authentic audience for their presentations. Using the screen sharing tools, students can easily share their technology products while they verbally share information. Be sure to record conferences to share with absent students, parents, and community.

# Planning and Hardware Setup

**1.** **Plan** your video conference with your teacher partner(s) ahead of time. Decide date, time, agenda, and video conferencing tool you'll use. Use World Clock Meeting Planner to find the best time for all.

**2.** Before the conference, **test** the video conferencing tool on the devices and in the rooms you'll be using to make sure the connection is good. Practice using the features of the vid- eo conferencing tool you select. Make sure camera and microphone are turned on and test them to make sure they are working.

**3.** If your conference involves a **large group** or if your time is limited, have someone in each location login early and make sure everything is working before others join you.

**4.** Mute your **microphone** when you're not speaking for several minutes to avoid distracting background noise. Make sure it is unmuted when you are speaking.

**5.** Position your **camera** at eye level. Look directly at the camera whenever possible.

**6.** Some teachers allow students to connect to their peers using their own Skype or Facetime accounts. Be sure to comply with your **school or district's policy** and recommendations.
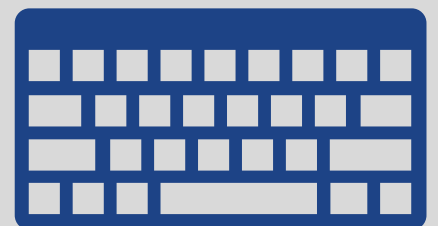
# Platforms for Video Conferencing

The platform you decide to use will depend on what's available and works best for all schools participating in the conference. The technology providing options is constantly changing. To help you make the best decision, use Technological Needs Assessment worksheet. Some of the popular and often used platforms include Skype, Google Hangouts, Real/Presence, Talky.io, Appear.in, and Zoom. Click here to find out more information about the different platform options.
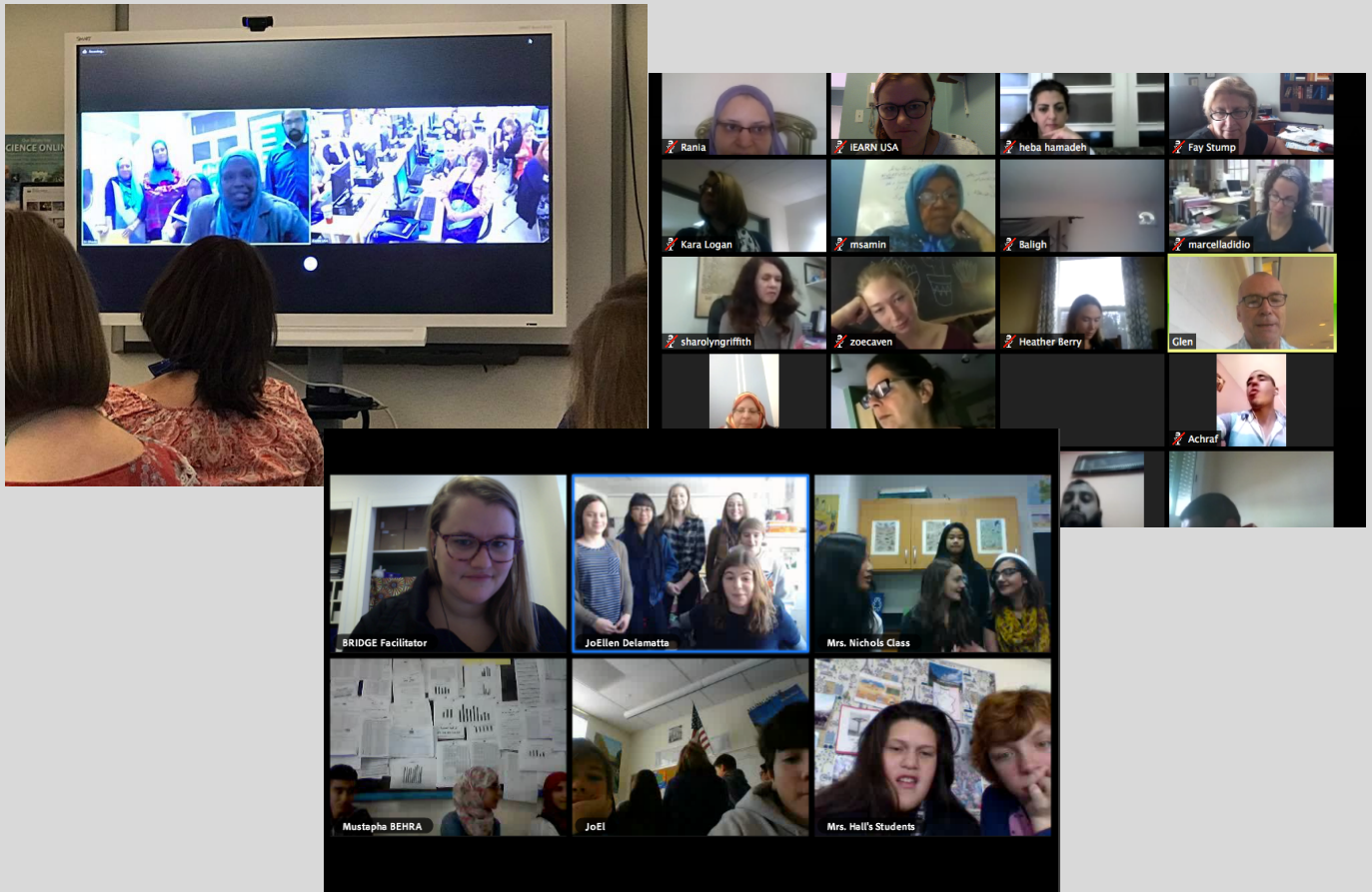


**zoom** We have found Zoom to work for most users. Compare Zoom plans to see if the free plan meets your needs.

> 66 *Thanks to the cultural differences, the participants will share and learn from each other a lot. Equally important, the interaction will help them boost their personal potential and skills. This will lead to self-awareness that paves the way for a positive change in terms of the character, vision and even dreams. We should not forget how inspirational and motivational are the moments spent connecting with an international partner."*
> *Khalid Fethi |Educator | Morocco*

# Troubleshooting

Live communication works best when students can see and hear each other. The quality of the conference will depend on the broadband speed, number of users currently using the services of your carrier, and even weather conditions. However, the excitement of face to face contact with global partners makes overcoming the challenges worthy of your time and patience! Here are some common trouble-shooting tips:

- **Video freezes, audio cuts out or speeds up:** use an ethernet cable rather than wifi or involve fewer number of computers connected to conference room.
- **Hearing an echo of everything you are saying:** use headphones or mute the person causing the echo.
- **Screen freezing or lagging behind when others speak:** stop streaming videos, updating software, or anything else that competes with your internet connection.
- **No sound, you can't hear anyone:** make sure your headset is configured properly, turn up volume on computer and/or in software, plug headset into different USB port.

- **Still having issues? Try one of these solutions:**
  1. Sign out of the platform and sign back in
  2. Close all other open windows and programs on your device
  3. Restart your computer
  4. Try a different device

> *Building global relationships is vital for successful global project engagement. While communication through email and discussion posts help to build those relationships, seeing and hearing global partners through video conferencing is the most effective form of communication. It's almost as good as meeting each other in person! Learning to use technology tools for communication is an integral component of 21st Century Learning."*
> *Fay Stump | Project Facilitator | Hedgesville, WV*

*A special thank you to Fay Stump for her contributions to this guide.*